# The Unitarian Christian

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# EDITORIAL

**O come, all ye faithful.**

We would never have had our Christmas had it not been for the nature-worshipping pagans of Central Europe and Scandinavia. In the sixth and seventh centuries, when the Church of Rome began the attempt to Christianize the world, their missionaries found these pagan people on the whole hospitable to Christianity, and ready to adopt it, not as their only religion (that came later) but as a religion worthy of their respect, and worthy of being recognized by them as a religion which they could not afford to reject, but would do wisely to accept as a perfectly good, permissible form of faith and worship for those who liked it.

But the missionaries were troubled by the flat refusal of these heathen to give up certain universal and deeply beloved features in their own nature worship; such as, the summer and winter solstices, the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and so on. Christian or no Christian, they clung desperately, refusing to budge, to their Yule-tide, their Beltane Feast, their Lent and Easter.

Returning to Rome the missionaries reported their inability to put a stop to these old practices and begged the Holy Father for instructions. Whereupon the Pope, in his magnanimity, decreed that these old feasts should be undisturbed, but given new and Christian meanings. Beltane should become All Saints' Day. Easter should commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ. Yule-tide should symbolize the birth of Christ.

To this day Christmas and Easter still retain vestiges of their original meanings and characters, and many Christians admit that these great days are in a way strengthened, enriched and made more intimate and appealing to us by that very retention of their first beauty and flavor. This may explain one of the sweetest of the many happy qualities of our Christmas—its all-inclusiveness. In no single detail of our Christian worship do we feel so strongly the sense of an underlying unity as in Christmas. It rejects nobody. Orthodox or Liberal, saint or sinner, dogmatist or heretic, Christmas leaves nobody out, demands no qualifications, insists on no theological shibboleths, rejects no one but the scoffer, who of course never comes anyway.

Our favorite Christmas hymn invites everybody: O, come, all ye faithful. One only has to be faithful, but he is free to choose his own object of faith: Mahomet, God, or Shiva, Jehovah, Allah, Manitou, or Father in Heaven. This is quite in keeping with the teaching of Jesus. The important thing is just to have faith, to fear not, only believe, to love much. He leaves each one to supply his own predicates, as though the mere exercise of the virtue were of more importance than the creed, or the concept, or the postulate towards which it is exercised.

Be that as it may, Christmas is the most generous, understanding, sweetest, undiscriminating, and therefore best beloved day on our calendar. Our task is to keep it so. It is more than a Day; it is an ideal, and beware how we allow our ideals to grow pale, dim, emaciated, by misuse or neglect.

The story is told of Mr. Joseph H. Choate, who for six years was our ambassador to the Court of St. James, that comparing notes "on the times" one day with a friend, he remarked: "You know, I am beginning to feel a serious concern for the moral health of these poor New Yorkers." When the friend asked him why, he replied: "With the *New York Sun* coming out each morning and making vice attractive, and the *Evening Post* each afternoon making virtue repellent, wouldn't you say they are in a rather hazardous position?"

As an ideal, Christmas has the ability of making itself and its ideal attractive, in fact irresistible, and to all sorts and conditions of men. The more jealous, fastidious, insistent we are in observing it properly, the more we shall help it to be the power it can be.

C. E. P.

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# THE CHRISTMAS SECRET

**Palfrey Perkins**

Throughout forty-five years in the ministry, I have come annually to Christmas Day and have realized that there is never anything *new* to say about it. As a matter of fact, no one wants to hear anything new. The old story itself is forever new. Indeed: perhaps it is impertinent to talk at all at Christmas time. Would it not be better just to hear again—and to linger over—the old familiar story? Christmas is beyond the reach of philosophy, rationalism or analysis. Christmas is not a time for arguing or criticizing or explaining. That is why children love it. It is a time for singing, for accepting, for affirming.

Legend, magic, miracle—Wise Men, Shepherds, Angels: these are Christmas! And we say: "These are all right in the old story. But here and now, in a calculating and disillusioned world, they don't work. We meet no angels nowadays." The danger is that we may become proud of being "grown-up" in religion, of being set free from superstition and myth and fancy. But being "grown-up" in religion is disastrous if all awe and reverence disappear from life.

Coleridge once said that wisdom begins and ends in wonder. The first wonder, he called the child of ignorance; but the last, he said, "is the parent of adoration." So "grown-up-ness" in religion is a kind of half-way stage between the childish wonder left behind, and the mature wonder still ahead. Thomas Hardy, a "grown-up" in religion if there ever was one, cast a wistful backward look, when he wrote the lines:

"So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet I feel
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come, see the oxen kneel
In the lonely barton by yonder combe
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him through the gloom
Hoping it might be so."

The wonder of childish simplicity Hardy would never know again but the wonder which is at the end of wisdom, he had still to grow into. The trouble today with us liberal Christians is that we are more ready to argue about and try to explain, the divine reality in the stable of Bethlehem, than we are to kneel and adore. We shy away from the ardor of faith. We are afraid of doing something irrational. Heaven knows, Liberal Christianity has rationalism enough and to spare! What it needs is passion, ardor, devotion.

Some day the wise and prudent may come into their heritage but not until they have become as little children. The Christmas secret is an open secret. The wise may spin out elaborate implications of Christmas; they may work out philosophical and metaphysical expressions of its meaning. But not for the wise alone is the Christmas secret. It may be revealed to all who are humble enough to recognize it and receive it.

"Go humbly; humble are the skies,
And low and large and fierce the Star.
So very near the Manger lies
That we may travel far."

We come to Christmas this year with the problem of human relationships very far from solved. The state of the world makes it look as if the world's wisdom were madness; as if God had chosen the foolish things of the world to confuse the wise. Christmas is one of those foolish things! It is a kind of lucid interval in the world's madness—when we enter into the glories of the age to come, wherein man shall come to himself, Christmas is the pledge of the "good time coming."

Evelyn Underhill, the mystic who had a sense of humor, wrote to a friend, "I do hope your Christmas has had a little touch of eternity in among the rush and pitter and patter and all. It always seems such a mixing of this world and the next—but that, after all, *is* the idea."

Of course we love the simplicity and homeliness, the tenderness and beauty of the little holy family in Bethlehem. But there is eternity there too—and more than a little touch. At Christmas we all see this vision of eternity—dim or clear. We are all touched by noble emotion; we all share an undying memory; we all dream again, dreams we have lost awhile; we all see the world and heaven through eyes as wide and wondering as any baby's. All this at Christmas! It is the vision of love as the secret of eternal life. If only we would refuse to go back after the holy day, to the treadmill-routine in which we always put self first. Let us rather—denying all other gods—try to carry the secret of love which came—and comes—to the world at Christmas, into all the days and years before us. This is Reality. This is Life—Eternal Life.

# A HUMAN CHRISTMAS

Robert L. Zoerheide

When George Bernard Shaw was a young man he started a Society for the Abolition of Christmas. It never amounted to much except to express religious indignation similar to the kind demonstrated by Jesus when he cleansed the Temple by driving out the money changers and peddlers.

Every one of us feels something of this indignation as we see the shelves of our stores being loaded on November 1 with trinkets and such bizarre items as mink-handled can openers. A mother of one of our church school pupils asked: "What can we do to counteract the commercialism of Christmas?" This may remain an essential question for some years to come.

The only thing worse, for a Unitarian, is the tinsel curtain of theological obscurities drawn across the mind of America at this time of joy and celebration. From the weight of miracles, theology and commercialism, it seems a wonder that Christmas doesn't collapse upon itself. But it has not done so yet. Somehow the things that matter least remain inconsequential because they are transient, and the things that matter most remain substantial because they are permanent.

Christmas appears to be an institution in our calendar year of unquestioned durability. It does not survive because it is good for business, but because it is good for people.

There was a time, however, when it had to fight its way in. The question of observing Christmas day arose in 1621, and Governor Bradford wrote in his record: "On the day called Christmas-day, the Governor called them out to work as was usual." The Pilgrims and Puritans avoided the celebration of Christmas because its indulgence and commercialism seemed pagan and its theology, Popish. After all, the last syllable made it clearly a day for the celebration of a mass for Christ. It took Christmas nearly two hundred years to establish itself in the American Church calendar.

Today, however, not even a skeptical Unitarian would doubt that Christmas is here to stay. There is all the more reason for the conscience to watch and the reason to weigh. It has been said of Americans that they live culturally by overstatement. This applies to religion! We seem to lack the modesty and restraint to know when we've had enough theology. Religion has never been improved by the assembly-line of magic, creed, and dogma. Christmas has survived the theology based upon the calling of the Holy Ghost in Matthew, but the manger simplicity of Luke and the intelligent silence of Mark must be looked to for the connection between the life and ethics of Jesus which precede the telling of birth stories.

If the writers of the two birth stories in the four Gospels had been on-the-spot reporters their accounts would have had less poetry and more accuracy; but no one would have read them. As it was, both Matthew and Luke told their stories at least ninety years after the birth of Jesus in 5 B. C., and to great advantage.

Once Jesus had lived and the early fellowship of his followers had had an opportunity to pit itself aginst the reality of a deeply entrenched religious world, the ethical context of the life of Jesus gave great force to the Gospel's poetic exaggeration. Mark, writing earliest, was discreetly silent about the birth, but Matthew plainly enjoyed the imaginative vehicle of theology which he set forth. Such preoccupation is not foreign to our day, and even in some historically high places of religious liberalism. It remained for Luke to express the wayside truth of natural warmth at the time of human birth, though Luke is not without flights of poetry and long cruises of theology. John, on the other hand, never quite found the humanity of Jesus; he was carried away by the desire to present Jesus as the pre-arranged King and ignored having him born at all.

The most human and reasonable Christmas should afford a few liberties. We know perfectly well that Jesus had to live before he could be born. He had to live a wonderfully exemplary life before anybody took his birth seriously enough to record it. The same process goes on everywhere in life but it takes a person as truly remarkable as Jesus the carpenter's son to bring it home to us. The giver precedes the gift! No worthwhile gift should remain anonymous; and for very good reason.

The enemy of the gift, and especially the gift of life, is the person or the situation making no demand upon us. The enemy of Christmas is the bearer of gifts who represents no ethical demand through his gift. This does not mean that every present need shine with some particular virtue; but every present must bear the symbol and seal of common accord and expectation or else it degrades both giver and receiver.

Giving is therefore most joyous in a family

because in the family we can expect the most from one another. Once human birth and the family reached the post-animal stage of representing the hope for continued morality, justice, and love, it began to carry with it an ethical givenness quite unique in the life stream, and in the universe itself. We have no assurance that love and justice dwell among the cold galaxies or are entwined in the complexities of atomic structure. But these now imperishable qualities do reside in human beings and their preservation will be our permanent grandeur if we see the divinity of our obligation to perpetuate them. After all, what could be more sacred and joyous than the high requirement to keep alive ethical faith and give it flesh through the birth and celebration of the gift of life?

A human Christmas will celebrate exemplary humanness wherever it is found, because the only truth of a good life is what it does. If our lives are devoted to personal aggrandizement and selfish interest then we will make them baser qualities live and breathe. We become what we do. One is born a person and becomes a musician, another is born a person and becomes a carpenter; but to each is given the equal opportunity to make incarnate the finest human qualities. Loving a neighbor becomes life and flesh to the precise degree that loving things are done for the neighbor. The act confirms and defines as it gives birth to a personality.

Christmas, like each one of us, is always in the making. It presents us with boundless choice for family gatherings, gifts, celebrations, and worship. Unitarians feel the vitality of the time. The choices we make for Christmas are much the same as the choices we make every day of the year except that they may be gilded. We are guided by the culmination of what we have become. There is no *a priori* rule for the choice of what painting the artist will next paint. His life, like ours, is in touch with self-evolving principles coming from within, the social realities coming from around, and cosmic affinities coming from beyond. These cosmic affinities have a tidal effect upon both spirit and motivation.

Rachel Carson has a section in her book, *The Sea Around Us,* which describes the relationship important to underline. It is the one arising within our lives as we choose our way through Christmas. In preface to her wise words, we would be recalling the way in which the birth of Jesus, like the birth of those we know and love, is the life force making possible a movement and a closer relationship with the larger values we count precious. Such kinship is not provincial; our lives are deeply touched by values made incarnate through great lives in all times and in all lands.

Rachel Carson has pointed out that "There is no drop of water in the ocean, not even in the deepest parts of the abyss, that does not know and respond to the mysterious forces that create the tide." It is an easy step to sense the moving tide of life from this analogy. "The tides," she goes on to say, "present a striking paradox, and the essence of it is this: the force that sets them in motion is cosmic, lying wholly outside the earth and presumably acting impartially on all parts of the globe, but the nature of the tide at any particular place is a local matter, with astonishing differences occurring within a very short geographic distance." The fact that Rachel Carson believes the sea to be the mother of the first life on earth only adds to these words.

The forces that set our lives in motion, and which are felt strongly at Christmas time, come from within us and from the social geography around us; but they act upon us with cosmic power, the universal wonder and promise of birth. Such tides inspired the words: "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given."

Christmas should set us in motion to recall the record of human hopes and achievements. As the record improves, each life becomes more sacred. As the highest gift to be made real in an ethical context, life bears always the potential of faith. It is easy to dispute an idea, even a theological idea like the miraculous conception of Mary, but it is impossible to dispute a person. If every form of religion in the world were suddenly to disappear, it would still be possible to love, to be useful, and to seek with heart and soul and mind the privileges of justice. The fact of any life well lived can rise above the forms of historic religion.

Christmas offers the opportunity to clear the deck of organized religion by celebrating the unlimited wonder, mystery, love and promise of birth and family relationships.

A Bible study group in our church tried to clear the deck of their own beliefs by setting down the family things that mean the most at Christmas time. The very first volunteer said: "It's hard to put into words, but there a joy and mystery which children feel and which we feel; but I like the way Christmas makes me interested and concerned for those who are alone and for those against whom life has dealt harshly and unjustly." These words of a mother in a Unitarian church join the two great ends of Christmas into a circle. They place birth and childhood in the context of maturity and moral

responsibility. A Unitarian would be the first to agree that there is no better way to intensify Christmas than by birth in a responsible home; futhermore, the phrase "born again, would not be distasteful if it contained some manger, straw, and cattle realism. The manger realism of being "born again" in our day will show by faith that the star of the East shines with hope upon the United Nations Organization. The wise men will come separate ways, perhaps from the halls of the Supreme Court bearing the gift of justice, or perhaps from Lambarene bearing the gift of mercy. These too are cosmic affinities.

The celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas time offers a star clear opportunity for the ethical and spiritual renewal of the human spirit, which is, in its deepest sense, most like the event of birth itself. Life is no pushover for goodness. The finest that heaven and earth can concur to produce may find the world as over-crowded as the Inn. Birth and rebirth must have affinities which are eternal if they are to last. We find this "something eternal" in the birth celebration of a child like Jesus because we have found it first of all in his remarkable life. We have wanted to find it in ourselves. If Christmas were not human also and deeply infused, if we were not celebrating our better selves when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, if the simplicity, beauty, wonder, mercy, justice, and mystery were not confirmed by our being and defined in our actions, the home would fall to the night club, and the department store would triumph over the simple integrity of giving a gift.

The challenge and the beauty of a human Christmas is to be found in knowing how to be born. Jesus will be born right when we remember some of his north side feeling of justice as well as his south side feeling of compassion. The vituperation he let loose on his own people, the scribes and the Pharisees, is still ringing over some of the cold hills this season: "you serpents," "you generation of vipers." Yet he never disclaimed being one with his people.

His spirit is still being born in the cities. The despised woman may feel it, or the paralytic, the demented, the blind and the crowds of poor. Yet Jesus knew he had no monopoly on compassion. Without such recognition, the chances are December would mean little more than winter. Humility toward virtue never prevented him from giving it birth.

Pearl Buck was once asked by a young novelist how to prepare himself for the writing of fiction. She replied in Christmas language: "Be born anywhere, little embryo novelist, but do not be born under the shadow of a great creed, not under the burden of original sin. . . . Go out and be born among gypsies, or thieves, or among happy, workaday people who live in the sun and do not think about their souls." This advice has a ring of familiarity not unlike the birth story of Jesus.

The text for the story of a human Christmas is found in Luke: "And she brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the Inn."

A child destined to become a man like Jesus could be born anywhere.

# HUMANISM AND BEYOND: A TRANSITION

**Jacob Trapp**

*This address was delivered at the annual meeting of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, May, 1956. It was published in the July number of the "Christian Register," and is reprinted here by the kind permission of the "Christian Register."*

I was brought up under a strict Calvinist creed, the harshness of which was mitigated by several factors. One was an early developed love of nature. Nature, though sometimes cruel, or utterly overwhelming, was also rich, magnificent, and sometimes gloriously beautiful, and never seemed as bleakly under a curse as the catechism would have us believe. As a child I came to love, and sometimes also to tremble before the beauty of the Lord's house, and the place—this whole universe—where his glory dwells. Another mitigating factor was the nourishment of love and security in a large family, not dominated by the cold features of John Calvin but graced rather by the image of a non-rejecting and divinely compassionate Jesus. A third mitigating factor was that together we read and reread Biblical literature, so much of which strains against and bursts the bonds of any pattern of dogmatic interpretation imposed upon it. My parents and their associates were essentially generous and utterly charitable people; and what they became, I am convinced, constituted a triumph of Biblical religion over Calvinistic creed.

At the age of fourteen or thereabouts I had already decided that a family of non-believing neighbors of whom I was very fond were not going to be condemned to everlasting torment in hell. The real God of this great universe, so I told myself one night, is not discriminating in favor of a tiny sect of Dutch Calvinists. Or, as I might have said years later, he was not a petty constitutional monarch, bound by the provisions

of the Augsburg or Heidelburg or Westminster Confession.

At the age of twenty I was excommunicated for heresy. For some years then I wandered, theoretically, in a wilderness of skepticism. I accepted with part of me the cold picture of a mechanistic world generalized from science. "The Friend is gone," as men said, "and man is alone in a cold and alien universe." The origin of this yearning, it was said, was found in the "groping of a lonely-souled gregarious animal to find its herd or its herd-leader in the great spaces beyond the stars." As Gilbert Murray, discussing this creed, put it, "the lower and not the higher forces are the eternal forces." Man, mind, human idealism, are an "epiphenomenon"—something that somehow briefly and accidently flares up into a glow-worm light from the universal darkness.

I sought refuge in philosophical idealism. But this came to seem but a magnificent and insubstantial architecture of abstractions.

I studied theology, and was dissatisfied, as many had been before me, with traditional arguments, that seemed but a rationalizing of the human will-to-believe.

So I came, as a fledgling Unitarian to what we have called "Naturalistic humanism." Nature is concretely real, and not entirely inimical to life, else life would not be flourishing on this planet. And men are concretely real, so let them seek and find together the way to a better life on this earth.

This was a good new beginning. I hardly realized it at the time, but this was really a restatement of the simple, childlike faith with which I first as a growing person went out to greet the world—faith in the reality of things and persons—yet a faith which lies also at the very basis of valid science, and of all philosophy which does lose sight of concreteness and is really a search for wisdom.

The warm center of that humanism, the honey in the lion, was human love. Despite all we used to say about the universe being dark, non-intelligent, non-spiritual, empty of all the qualities we think of as distinctively and beautifully human—although, strangely, not empty of the human—the practical quality of being genuinely religious was possible to us. A wise Hasidic rabbi once said that sometimes it is good to deny God. When you see a human need before you that cries out for a response, you are to act as though there were no God, and respond to that need. A humanism that denies or ignores God in that good way, so to speak, by doing the deeds of love, also thereby, I would further say, affirms God in a very practical manner.

Humanism, then, was a partial answer to a real need, a good place to stand while taking one's bearings.

I once heard a brilliant lecturer on Judaism say that a Jew must believe in man, despite all the evidence to the contrary, because he is commanded to do so in his revelation. Actual encounters with heroic good in persons have constituted for me also such a commanding revelation. An obscure Hasidic rabbi once said, "There are people within whom the good traits of Cain's soul have their habitation, and these are very great." As a perceptive child with a sharp eye for human lapses and frailties (we tend to forget as we grow older how deeply our children look into us, and unriddle us), I had seen something of this wonderful reality in a few persons known intimately, and now I began to see it again, more variously and richly. I could not deny the reality of that existential good, and was moved to an admiration for it of an altogether different and more profound kind than the admiration I might have had for a smoothly functioning machine. Here was spirit wrestling with circumstance, and creating something. Here was spirit acted upon by pain, and in turn acting to transmute pain into beauty and compassion and sweetness and strength. So I came to believe in man, imperfect, observable man, and man the unseen, the essential, who in all his encounters and struggles with a real world, is the maker of poems and music, and goodness, and wisdom. And I found that to believe in man is already to believe in more than man. To have faith in man, which requires a belief in freedom, is implicitly to infer something about the universe or the spiritual parentage which gave birth to that freedom.

I became, shall we say, more imaginatively humbled and receptive before the mystery of life and the universe. I began to see that the very un-grown-up idea I had toyed with—that men are, or ought to be, or may become, lords and masters of creation—did not tally with what I found when I consulted what Yeats called "that little, infinite, faltering, eternal flame that we call ourselves." We are not lords and masters, but rather sons of the Father, or children of the household, and therein lies our significance and our capacity. "Naturalistic humanism," as a philosophic garment, didn't quite fit any more, because for me there was a reality comprehending, sustaining, creatively at work in both man and nature—a Power of Being, fathomless, infinite, transcendent, yet also immanent, nearer to me than I am to myself.

The mystery in us rests in the fathomless mystery of which we are a part. The wonder in us moves in that streaming, infinite wonder of

the Nameless and the Fathomless.

The power by which we live is that greater power within us. We may doubt God's existence, and yet if God were not it would not lie in our power to doubt Him. Our power to doubt Him is a given thing and is part of that freedom by which we are to grow, to challenge, and to remake our inadequate concepts. "In Him we live and move and have our being." In Being-itself all things participate, and in Being-itself they have their existence.

This change of feeling and outlook had two important implications. The one was a renewed sense of belonging, of cosmic at-homeness. The Prodigal Son returns home. It was right that he should have made his departure. It was good also that he should return, to a new and larger home.

> Thou hast destroyed what in thyself was closest
> To tremble after it with a new desire,

as the poet said. This at-homeness breeds trust in the Power of Being that works through us, and is, I believe, a universally and profoundly needed secret of self-acceptance, health, wholeness, confidence, and strength.

A second and important implication was an enlargement and deepening of vista. What an unfortunate literalness and shortsightedness it had been to substitute for the richness, the poetry, the up-reaching and limitless reference of that mighty metaphor, the Kingdom of God, the finished finiteness of the commonwealth of man, which ought rather to be included within and continually tested and exalted by the larger ideal. We are to build an earthly city and, in the building of it fair, in the hallowing of the everyday, we seek also a heavenly city, whose co-maker and co-builder is God. By this I mean that we seek more than is ours by sight; that not all of us belongs to what is visible and transitory, and which death so quickly claims; that our life on this earth is a proving ground of what an honest and courageous faith can bring to God of the unique good or beauty of every individual soul. Our earthly citizenship is to be interpenetrated with this ideal citizenship; the commonwealth of man is to be enhanced and hallowed by the Kingdom of God, even now among us and within us, in which the perishable creature may partake of the savor and the substance of that which is imperishable and in which every perishable beauty is an imperishable present thing.

So I underwent a transition from humanism, which makes an "ism" of man, not to theism, which may likewise make an "ism" of a particular idea of God, but to a religion, or a life, which, however inadequately, seeks in a living dialectic between person and person, and in the infinite riches of this universe which millions of Einsteins and Shakespeares and Aristotles, all the genius of all intelligent creaturehood in all infinity, will never begin to exhaust, the response of meaning which addresses us out of the mystery. This response of meaning is a divine encounter, not a merging. This seeking is not a searching, apart from life, for One who is somewhere else, but a meeting in life, in our encounters with one another and the world, of One who is everywhere.

One of the last things I came to in my transition—something, it would seem, which should have been obvious all along—was that my humanism had been a kind of taken-for-granted residue of values built into our culture by a great and distinctive heritage. I came to full realization of this only when I began to study intensively over a number of years the various great scriptures and cultures of the world, and to see that however deeply and sympathetically I tried to enter into full understanding of them, and however obvious were some of the similarities and some of the differences, there were also differences of the utmost subtlety, and many psychological and emotional nuances that remained incomprehensibly strange, profoundly difficult for an outsider to understand and feel at home with. I realized with startling clarity that I was not a Hindu, nor a Buddhist, nor a Taoist, nor a Shintoist, nor a Sikh, nor a muslim, but a Christian, and that my values, my thoughts, my way of feeling and thinking about people and the world, had their roots, their shaping, their leafage and continuing breath of life in our Judeo-Christian heritage. My humanism, all western humanism, was a residue of that or, in a more vital sense, a blossoming from that great tree—our Judeo-Christian culture, which from Deuteronomy on down brought to the world in a unique fashion the idea of the inalienable dignity of every soul fashioned in the image of God, and therefore of the worth and responsibility of the individual, the dignity of labor and the dignity of the poor, and the equality of all men as children of God and brothers of one another. The mighty leaven of this thing, its vital this-worldly thrust in the vision and the possibility of a future men may create, coming down to us through Christianity and gathering to a new greatness there, is, I believe, the basic explanation of why science and political democracy, and societies which could not tolerate slavery as their base, arose in the West. Christianity announced to the world the coming of the kingdom of God, and this was Christianity's greatest single contrast to the world-escaping pessimism which lay for so long at the basis of the two great religions of the Far East, Hinduism and Buddhism. This announcement envisaged a goal for human history, and put a prophetic and a Messianic leaven at

work in Western civilization, a faith in the creative fashioning of a future which was a new thing in the world. The goal is not just life, but life improved, perfected, and transfigured.

So I rediscovered something of the distinctive greatness of Christianity; and this also enlarged my vision and deepened my enthusiasm for Unitarianism. Unitarianism—and in this we are no exception to any other religious group—truly lives by the measure in which it plays a creative role in the culture of which it is a part. It had its origins in heroically so doing. Unitarianism began among Bible-reading Anabaptists of the Reformation who, in spite of exile, dungeon, and the stake, courageously perceived and said that the doctrine of the Trinity was not a Biblical but a post-Biblical doctrine. They thus initiated, building more greatly than they knew, the deliverance of the Old and New Testaments from a dogmatic pattern that did violence to their contents, and delivered the Great Galilean, who put brotherhood above taboo, from an unreal singularity into the brotherhood of the great founders, the seers, the prophets, the avatars of the divine. Emerson said it for all the ages in his Divinity School address, where Jesus stands among the divine bards as one who makes us aware of the infinite Beauty which heaven and earth reflect to us in all lovely forms, from whom noble provocations go out, who serves us with his holy thought, and thus only. Christianity thus sheds the distortion of an Oriental mystery cult which clung to it, along with the primitive idea of a blood atonement, to realize its true genius of a hopeful, vital, world-transforming faith in the dignity and divinity of the distinctively and beautifully human—a babe in the manger still, but which is destined to grow in wisdom and in stature. The greatness of Unitarianism, in the future as in the past, and its tremendous opportunity, is to give courageous, unequivocal, creative, and inspiring leadership to this essential life-transforming and world-transforming genius of Christianity.

A second great step which Unitarians took more unequivocally than any other was the rejection of Bibliolatry. The relation contained in the Scriptures was for us a revelation of developing human experience as reflected in a great literature. We did not have to resist historical criticism of the Bible, nor ignore its findings, nor retreat step by step before it, but could advance with it to clearer and deeper understanding. To us, furthermore, the canon is not closed, nor is the age of inspiration ended. To look only to the past was equivalent to saying, as Emerson said, that God was, and not is. Here too a tremendous opportunity for leadership, and of creative participation in our culture awaits us. You will remember that in 1907 the Pope extirpated Modernism, root and branch, from the Catholic Church, excommunicating, with all their splendid historical scholarship, such men as the Abby Alfred Loisy in France and Father George Tyrrell in England; and how disappointed men like Thomas Harry were that this great ancient church, with its beauty of ritual and richness of tradition, should have chosen, instead of becoming a home for the free spirit and open to complete rational acceptance, decisively to set the clock back, to say thus far and no further to historical scholarship, and to close itself against new understanding and fresh interpretation of the great religious symbols. The Roman Church's loss is our opportunity toward a Christianity of true catholicity and liberalism. We shall make a tragic mistake if we abandon a great Judeo-Christian heritage, a tradition that belongs more truly to us than to the orthodox and the authoritarian. For its genius, from Moses heeding the call to go to Egypt and deliver a people, is a genius of liberation, of men as partners with God in the creation of the world—a genius which orthodoxy and authoritarianism can only obscure, or smother and misrepresent. A Unitarianism living up to its potential will understand orthodoxy better than orthodoxy understands itself, and the profound human need for acceptance, for deliverance from anxiety and guilt, which underlies its creeds and rituals. It will furnish great scholars, great teachers, dynamic and creative leadership in a growing and living tradition, with roots in the past and with continuity from generation to generation, in which alone significant values can be created, clarified, transmitted, and enriched.

A third step which Unitarians took—and this began significantly in Emerson's time—was to see that a light dawned also for the human race in the experiences and insights of other peoples, with scriptures and prophets of their own. Here again a magnificent opportunity awaits us to minister to a great need. For the end to be sought is not an imperialistic Christianizing of the whole world, but rather a true and enriching brotherhood of faiths. It remains a fact, alas, that religions are too much as yet a divisive factor in the world, and that perhaps the last in the world to be willing to cry "Brother" to the other religions will be Christianity, so strong is its hold as yet of its idea of a one true Church. Yet this too must come, and in this we can be prime movers, a liberalizing and creative leaven of our culture. The essence of the great religions, as Toynbee points out, is love, and in thwarting one another, instead of working together for a better world, they thwart their essence.

In all these things Unitarians can furnish leadership, scholarship, action: and as we do our future will inevitably be even greater than our past. We are bound to grow tremendously in response to a great need, not merely in number but also in stature, if we will but see and fulfill our task of creative participation and leadership in our Judeo-Christian culture, to bring out explicitly what has long been there for those who have eyes to see—a religion of the dignity and responsibility of man, of the transcendent and immanent divine, of the hallowing of all life, the beauty of which will come full circle only in a brotherhood of faiths which will yet heal our divisions, lead us beyond the exile of the religions, and make all mankind sons of God and members one of another. The essence of Christianity is the sublime simplicity and yet the utter difficulty, the living concreteness and yet the true catholicity of "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me"—an essence which can be transmitted only in a life, from person to person, and which will yet lead to the discovery of an underlying common faith and an essential brotherhood of mankind.

Such in outline is the transition I have undergone. I offer it in all humility as a stammering attempt to relate something of a pilgrimage in which the finest things I have experienced—the I-Thou moments, the moments when the Mystery was addressed as Thou—are beyond expression.

For our most difficult problems as you know there are no easy answers. And for our finest experiences there are no ready formulas, but only intimations from a stammering Moses, and a bush aflame with unconsuming fire. So I come back again to being more imaginatively humbled and receptive before the mystery of life and the universe.

And I would say in closing: Let's not let our "isms" divide us. For the vision we would hold before the world's religions, of saying "brother" in spite of differences, of not thwarting but realizing their common essence, which is love, we are also to hold before ourselves, as a group which, despite differences, can work together for a better world, and which, because of our being inclusive of differences, can do so more greatly.

Edwin Arlington Robinson once likened this world to a spiritual kindergarten in which millions of human beings are trying to spell "God" with the wrong blocks. The wrong blocks, perhaps, are the divisive creeds, the exclusive claims, collective egoisms, and the various names which men insist upon as the only right names. And the right blocks, so this world will yet learn, are those which, in every language, and in wordless deeds, spell love.

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR LETTER OF RECENT DATE

**Amos B. Horlacher**

In my letter of August 12, which was widely distributed to persons on the mailing list of the UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN, I invited replies and comments. I expressed the hope at that time that we would receive a "flood of letters" in reply, and while the replies could hardly be so described, an encouraging response was made from such widely separated areas as London, England; Primavera Alto, Paraguay; California, Wisconsin, Utah, Maryland, Maine, and Arizona.

Far more significant than the number of responses and the widely various geography of the respondents, was the quality of what they wrote and the warmth of their response to the ideas my letter projected. The dominant note of all replies was approval of the suggestion that Unitarian Christians must learn to witness their faith and take—even make—occasion to do so. A correspondent from Vermont wrote, "I am confident that if the Unitarian Church would be more aggressive in setting forth its *Christian* point of view, there are literally hundreds who would turn to it who are now indifferent." Another from California wrote, "This is what I believe. Please let me know how I can help." From London, England, a woman wrote, "The world is full of people who desire to remain within the Christian heritage who yet find no spiritual home in orthodox Christian bodies." A man from Wisconsin raises the interesting query, "Must Unitarian Christians restrict themselves from close fellowship with liberal Christians in other denominations?"

Space does not permit me to list all of the interesting and many times provocative questions which are raised by these letters. I would like therefore to comment briefly on three general questions which embrace a large number of questions and comments contained in these letters.

My first comment has to do with our fellowship with liberal Christians in other denominations. Unitarians should face the fact squarely, and with no lack of humility, that we have no corner on liberalism! I know of many fine and courageous Christians who witness for a liberal faith—and often at great cost to themselves in terms of prestige and preferment—in many of the "non-liberal" churches. I regard it as one of our first orders of business as Unitarian Christians, as well as our high privilege, to support, sustain and, when necessary, befriend such per-

sons. One such act is better than ten thousand boastful words of "how liberal we are"!

A second general comment concerns the often unstated but nonetheless real sense of disappointment that our movement remains small; that it does not seem to catch on as do popular revivals and the like. Let's face it, my friends; we are not living in an expansive and secure era. We are in fact in the very midst of a time of fear, confusion and retreat from advanced positions won in more confident times. It is trite I know to say it, but I shall say it nonetheless: these are times which try men's souls. Let us not, therefore, hanker after numbers and popularity. Let us rather witness for what we believe is true; stand up for it when it would be easier to go along with the crowd and, above all, be a source of comfort and hope to those whose names we do not so much as know who are looking to us for courage, strength and leadership. History, and the salvation of our distressed and fearful world, has little use for popularity contests, Hooper ratings and the like. Ideas and ideals that are sound and true and good will prevail in the long run. But they must be valiantly espoused by men and women of courage and faith who are undismayed and unshaken when they know they stand alone.

My third and—for this issue—last comment has to do with the question, "What can I do to help?" At the risk of being regarded as a fantastic simpleton my answer to this question is that it is far more important "to be" than "to do." Western Christianity has been hag-ridden by the demand for activity, programs, projects, and tangible, measurable and reportable results. If we were to measure the ministry of Jesus by many of the standards we insist upon applying to ourselves, he would have to be accounted a failure! Jesus' greatest gift to mankind was himself—the imperishable ideal and reality of a life dedicated to God and his fellow men. Hence, I deem it my greatest—and indeed my indispensable duty—to *be* a Christian. What I do should follow naturally from that, and what you do about it may be quite different in form and direction from my activity. Yet for all of that, I believe there are some common tasks that befall each of us. One of these is to witness. How can this be done? Must we go out and cry our faith on the streets? Well, there are worse activities and one is to shrink from fear of offending people by talking to them seriously about the great issues of life and religion.

I shall venture a practical suggestion. All of us have friends and most of us have homes. Why not use these good things for a high purpose? I suggest that you take occasion to invite your friends and neighbors into your home for dinner or for a refreshment in the evening. You can find occasion—and it is not too difficult—to steer the conversation in the direction of sharing knowledge and conviction on the things that have to do with man's deepest hopes, desires and needs.

You wonder whether this is not using friendship for other than the high purposes of this relationship? I do not think so. Would you object if the tables were turned? If your friend wanted to talk to you about God and the things of His Kingdom, would you think less of him as a friend? I have been a minister for twenty-five years and have shared experiences with men in the coal mines, in great cities, in the jungles of the South Pacific, on a college campus, in hospitals, and in the privacy of their homes. Never once, so far as I could perceive, has any human being ever resented my desire to share with him my religious ideas and convictions.

If you have never done this, I invite you to try, where you are—NOW!

One word of warning is required. Are you ready to *share* in good faith? No one susceptible of liberal persuasion wants to be preached to except in church!

If such a program were to be followed by a hundred Unitarian Christians, I can envision two hundred where one hundred grew before, and soon there might be four hundred from that two hundred and so on. "Ah," you may say, "there we go again; back at the old numbers game right after you cautioned us against excessive activism. Why not frankly undertake a revival meeting and get it done with?" Because, my friend, a revival meeting is a shot in the arm. It is a kind of narcotic that cannot and does not sustain life. True and healthy growth occurs quite differently. It is initiated and is sustained only when it has to do with the life force and that is to be found not among vast and faceless crowds on an emotional spree, but in the quiet and lovely places of human companionship—in the quiet place of your home and your circle of friendship.

Here then if you want something to do is an activity genuinely worth doing. Don't be surprised if you find in it the greatest happiness you have ever known, and such awareness of God's presence and blessing as is vouchsafed to few "professing" Christians.

Unitarian Christian Fellowship
January 14, Arlington Street Church
Supper at 6
Dr. Eliot will give an address after supper

## THE RELIGION OF JESUS: A DISCOVERY

Henry Hallam Saunderson

How can we discover what we already have clearly in our hands? Is not Christianity, as we have it today, the religion of Jesus? Look at the creeds which undertake to declare the nature of Jesus as Christ; are they not the truth? Look at the rituals which have been created, and which are used by Christian congregations; do they not express the religion of Jesus? Look at our theological schools, at the students and professors, and especially at the tens of thousands of books in their libraries; are they not carrying forward the knowledge of what the religion of Jesus was? All these things and more we have, as the embodiment of Christianity; has a discovery been made, beyond all this, of the religion of Jesus? Can we find what never has been lost?

The answer to all these questions must be largely in the negative. Historic orthodox Christianity, as it has come down to us, and as we have it today, cannot be identified with the religion of Jesus. Writers of creeds, creators of rituals, organizers of hierarchies, composers of anthems and hymns, have very often gone far aside from the faith which the Master held. Christianity, and the religion of Jesus, differ widely.

Start with today and travel, in thought, through the centuries of the Christian era, to its beginning, and discover the gradual development of the contents of what is called Christianity. We come, in the earliest years of this era, to a MAN—not an ecclesiastic, nor a theologian, nor a ruler, nor a statesman: to a man who was a laborer, a thinker, a man of profound faith in God and of deep sympathy for human beings. And we can make the widely-inclusive statement that the religions which have been built up, in the name of Christianity, are very different from the religion of this man. And today one of the greatest adventures in religious thinking is the earnest endeavor to discover, beyond the intricacies of historic Christianity, the reality of the religion of The Man of Nazareth. Much has been learned, and much remains to be learned; but here is truly a *discovery.*

We are getting a clearer idea of a major contrast between two phases of the religion of Israel: the priestly and the prophetic. The priestly party was dominant, and formalistic; but the prophetic party, through the centuries, emphasized the direct approach of the individual soul to God. Jesus was, indeed, "the last and the greatest of the prophets of Israel." In many ways we are gaining new knowledge of the meaning of the personality and the religious faith, of this prophet.

The above paragraphs are written because of a highly significant event of this present time: the publication of a new book which sheds a flood of light in this field which we are exploring. The book, THE WAY OF JESUS, is by Charles Edwards Park, and it is published jointly by the Starr King Press and the Beacon Press of Boston. It deserves a wide and careful reading—and such a reading will be highly rewarding to the reader. We see The Man of Nazareth with added clarity. We gain a profounder knowledge of his vital religion.

This new book takes up the vastly important task of showing what Jesus meant by *The Way.* With rare clarity it gives us a picture of the Man. "We should find him a strong, clean, reverent, generous nature, a great heart, a singularly keen and active mind, a boundless sympathy and a practical solicitude, and exceedingly sensitive to spiritual values. He lived his life just as near to the heart of God as a human creature can get. His foremost aim was to do the will of his Father in Heaven. To that aim he devoted himself with a consecration that only death could defeat."

This book says that The Way of Jesus was his religion; that to Jesus "religion was nothing if not a personal matter." After the first chapter, which gives the setting of the life of Jesus, the author proceeds to interpret the faith of Jesus in God. "He often mentions God, but always as a being whose reality is, of course, not in question." But there was novelty in the faith of Jesus in God: he taught that God had a purpose, immediate and imperative, to build the Kingdom of God upon the earth, and to enlist men as his fellow-workers in that task.

Then come vitally important chapters on the Human Interest which was a driving motive in Jesus' life; on His Moral Incentive; His Sense of Purpose. *Conclusion* is the title of the final chapter. Thus we see Jesus as a dynamic personality, and we see clarified the workings of his inner life. The author says, "The Way of Jesus can either be our religion today, or the nucleus about which our religion may be built."

Jesus shows a vital and profound sympathy for human beings, the people of his times; but he lifts every problem into eternal light and declares principles of thought and conduct which apply to all the world and to the ages. Timeless and universal are his teachings. The author says, "It is this timelessness that enables him to speak with undiminished authority to us, almost two thousand years distant from him."